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TOR: 120017Z JAN 90

SUBJECT - NEW EVELOPMENTS IN THE
INVESTIGATION INTO THE JESUIT MURDERS

1. ACTION REQUIRED: NONE, FYI.

2. IN EARLY JANUARY 1990 NEW INFORMATION SURFACED INDICATING THAT THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES (ESAF) PROBABLY WAS INVOLVED IN THE MURDERS OF SIX JESUIT PRIESTS AND TWO OTHER PERSONS ON 16 NOVEMBER 1989. BELOW IS AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE CASE SINCE THE NEW INFORMATION WAS DEVELOPED. THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT BELIEVES IT IS CLOSE TO SOLVING THE MURDERS AND HAS INDICATED A MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT IS IMMINENT. TO DATE THREE ESAF OFFICERS ARE UNDER ARREST AND APPROXIMATELY 45 ENLISTED PERSONNEL ARE BEING DETAINED PENDING FURTHER INVESTIGATION. UNFORTUNATELY, THE CASE IS ATTRACTING TOO MUCH PUBLICITY WHICH MAY PLACE UNNECESSARY PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO CONCLUDE ITS INVESTIGATION TOO SOON.

Approved for Release

NOV 1993

3.

4. [REDACTED], AT AN UNSPECIFIED TIME IN MID-DECEMBER 1989 COLONEL GUILLERMO ALFREDO ((BENAVIDES)) MORENO, DIRECTOR OF THE MILITARY ACADEMY, TOLD LT. COLONEL MANUEL ANTONIO HERMENEGILDO ((RIVAS)) MEJIA, DIRECTOR OF THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT (SIU), THAT HE (BENAVIDES) ORDERED A GROUP FROM THE IMMEDIATE REACTION BATTALION ATLACATL TO GO TO THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL AMERICA (UCA) ON THE NIGHT OF THE MURDERS. BENAVIDES APPARENTLY TOLD RIVAS OF HIS DEED BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID OF THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTION AND WAS ASKING RIVAS FOR ASSISTANCE. RIVAS IN TURN SHARED THIS INFORMATION WITH HIS PREDECESSOR AT THE SIU, COLONEL NELSON IVAN ((LOPEZ Y LOPEZ)), CURRENT C-1 IN THE HIGH COMMAND (ESTADO MAYOR), WHOM THE ESTADO MAYOR HAD CHARGED TO WORK WITH THE SIU ON THE INVESTIGATION. LOPEZ Y LOPEZ THEN TOLD COLONEL CARLOS ANGEL ((AVILES)), APPARENTLY HIS CLOSE FRIEND WHO IS CURRENTLY THE C-5 AT THE ESTADO MAYOR, OF BENAVIDES' PLIGHT.

[REDACTED] AVILES EXPLAINED THE CHAIN OF ACQUISITION [REDACTED] BECAUSE HE FELT HE HAD TO HAVE A "SAFETY NET" IN THE EVENT THINGS WENT BAD.

5.

PONCE IMMEDIATELY CALLED IN AVILES, WHO DENIED HAVING TOLD [REDACTED] ANYTHING OF THE KIND. PONCE THEN CALLED FOR LOPEZ Y LOPEZ, AND IT WAS AVILES WHO WENT TO SEARCH FOR HIM. WHEN LOPEZ Y LOPEZ ARRIVED NEARLY AN HOUR LATER, HE DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE INCIDENT.

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██████████ PONCE SAID THAT
THE INFORMATION SHOULD INDEED BE INVESTIGATED, BUT AS A RUMOR.
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6. ██████████

██████████ GENERAL ((LARIOS)) ██████████ ADVISED
THAT HE (LARIOS) HAD BEEN BRIEFED ON THE ALLEGATIONS AND
CONSIDERED THEM TO BE SERIOUS CHARGES. HE SAID THE MATTER WOULD
BE INVESTIGATED AND THAT PRESIDENT ALFREDO ((CRISTIANI)) WOULD BE
ADVISED IMMEDIATELY. ██████████

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8. ON 9 JANUARY ██████████ REPORTED THAT LT. JOSE
RICARDO ((ESPINOZA)) GUERRA AND LT. GONZALO ((GUEVARA)) CERRITOS,
BOTH SECTION COMMANDERS IN THE BIRI ATLACATL, AS WELL AS LT.
YUSHSY RENE ((MENDOZA)) VALLECILLOS FROM THE MILITARY SCHOOL,
WERE PLACED UNDER ARREST AND ARE BEING HELD AT NATIONAL GUARD
HEADQUARTERS. NO LEGAL JUSTIFICATION HAS YET BEEN GIVEN FOR
THESE ARRESTS, ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE THIS IS A POLITICAL MOVE
DESIGNED TO SHOW THE PUBLIC PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN THE
INVESTIGATION. COLONEL BENAVIDES IS REPORTEDLY UNDER "BARRACKS
ARREST."

9. PRESIDENT ALFREDO ((CRISTIANI)) APPEARS TO BE EARNING
VALUABLE POLITICAL POINTS FOR HIS "MANAGEMENT" OF THIS INVESTI-
GATION AND HE APPEARS TO HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE POLITICAL
OPPOSITION AND CHURCH. THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS THAT THE
INVESTIGATION IS BEING DRIVEN BY A DEADLINE OF 23 JANUARY, WHEN
THE U.S. CONGRESS BEGINS ITS NEXT SESSION. CRISTIANI (AND OTHERS)
WANT THIS INVESTIGATION TO BE COMPLETED BY THAT DATE AND PRESSURE
IS BEING APPLIED TO THE ARMY AND THE SIU TO COMPLETE THEIR
INVESTIGATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

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10. ON 8 JANUARY CRISTIANI NAMED A MILITARY HONOR TRIBUNAL TO INVESTIGATE THE CASE. THE TRIBUNAL IS COMPRISED OF ARMY OFFICERS AND TWO CIVILIAN LAWYERS. THERE IS CONCERN IN THE EMBASSY THAT THE TRIBUNAL WILL BECOME THE LEAD INVESTIGATING BODY, REPLACING THE SIU, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT "THE FOX IS INVESTIGATING THE CHICKENS" AND THAT THE SIU WILL LOSE PRESTIGE AS AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE BODY (THE SIU IS AN EMBASSY CREATION). TO AVOID THE SITUATION THE EMBASSY IS ASKING THAT THE HONOR TRIBUNAL ISSUE AN ORDER TO THE SIU TO THE EFFECT THAT THE SIU INVESTIGATE THE MURDERS IN AN INDEPENDENT MANNER AND REPORT THE RESULTS TO THE TRIBUNAL. IN EFFECT, THE TRIBUNAL'S ORDER WOULD BE A FORM OF CHARTER FOR THE SIU AND WOULD PRESERVE THE SIU'S IMAGE AS INDEPENDENT.

11. THE LATEST EVENTS IN THE INVESTIGATION OF THE MURDERS HAS FOSTERED AN OPTIMISTIC FEELING BOTH IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE EMBASSY.

THERE IS ALSO A DEGREE OF SKEPTICISM
AND ALL POSSIBLE
LEADS ARE BEING INVESTIGATED. POSSIBLY THESE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS WILL CREATE FURTHER TENSIONS WITHIN THE ARMY AS AN INSTITUTION, SPECIFICALLY THE "TANDONA." THE TANDONA WAS ALREADY UNDER FIRE FROM YOUNGER OFFICERS AND THESE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS MAY ONLY FUEL THAT FIRE.

END OF MESSAGE